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Article

The *Vel* of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign

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Abstract
This article addresses the relationship between anti-racism and decolonization in the North American context. It argues that the logic of decolonization movements for indigenous sovereignty and against the settler states of Canada and the USA overlap the discursive field of contemporary post-racialism in ways that circumvent the challenges and possibilities offered by black radicalism in the historic instance. After engaging recent theoretical literature on settler colonialism, it is suggested that the freedom drive that abolishes slavery unsettles both colonial and decolonial forms of sovereign determination.

Keywords
African Americans, Native Americans, race relations, settler colonialism, slavery

> The *vel* returns in the form of a *velle*. That is the end of the operation. Now for the process. (Jacques Lacan, 'Position of the Unconscious')

Introduction

In the spring of 2011, the Department of Equity Studies and the Centre for Feminist Research at York University in Toronto hosted a three-day international conference entitled 'Our Legacy: Indigenous-African Relations Across the Americas'. Professor Bonita Lawrence initiated the event after publishing a pair of articles on the principal theme (Lawrence and Dua, 2005; Amadahy and Lawrence, 2009).[1] This and similar gatherings of late suggest that the emergent political-intellectual discourse in the North American context regarding 'communities of color and their relationship to settler colonialism' (Jafri, 2012) is driven more precisely by an abiding concern, or anxiety, about the position and function of African-derived people. It has to do with a formulation of the fundamental relations between racial slavery and settler colonialism in the development of global modernity (Dirlik, 2007). Insofar as such interests are geared toward an engagement with

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struggles for abolition and reconstruction, on the one hand, and decolonization and resurgence, on the other, they invariably highlight 'the paradoxical nature of freedom in Indian Territory' (Saunt, 2004).

I adumbrate below the intervention of indigenous scholars and their allies on the theory and practice of anti-racism in the contemporary United States and Canada. I attempt to discern several convoluted elements: 1) a folk concept of racial slavery with a truncated account of its historical formation (in which slavery is reduced to a species of coerced migration and forced labor instituted in the 17th century), 2) an elision of slaveholding and the dissemination of anti-blackness among Native peoples throughout the continent (in which Indian slavery is either ignored or marginalized and anti-blackness is conflated with colonial white supremacy), 3) a liberal political narrative of emancipation and enfranchisement immune to the history of black radicalism (in which the post-bellum achievement of black citizenship, or 'civil rights', is both taken for granted and mistaken for the substantive demands of 'freedom, justice and equality'), and 4) a misidentification of black inhabitation with white and other non-black settlement under the colonial heading (in which 'the fact of blackness' is disavowed and the fundamental racism of colonialism is displaced by the land-based contest of nations). These elements draw from and contribute to the discourse of post-racialism by diminishing or denying the significance of race in thinking about the relative structural positions of black and non-black populations, not in order to assert the colorblind justice of American or Canadian society or to extol the respective virtues and vices of 'model' and 'problem' minorities, but rather to establish the contrasting injustice of their settler colonial relations with indigenous peoples. The convolution has been suggestive – even symptomatic – and the sustained encounter is long overdue or long underway, depending on the vantage. The argument below could be considered a symptomatic reading of the problematic of sovereignty as an element of (settler) decolonization. It is motivated by a desire for (settler) decolonization without, and against, sovereignty. To that end, we might consider Black Studies as the field of interpretation in relation to the discourse of Native Studies at the point where the latter loses touch with itself and unconscious knowledge emerges as interference in the logic of theoretical elaboration. 'Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false' (Fanon, 2008: 83).[2]

Unsettling Decolonization

Native Studies in the North American academy has attained critical mass in the last generation and commands growing attention across the interdisciplinary humanities and social sciences as scholars rethink their research and teaching protocols in response to the emergent scholarship and the collective pressure exerted by native scholars, students and communities. There are in Canada and the USA at present more than half a dozen peer-reviewed academic journals published by major university presses and nearly 30 programs of advanced study leading to graduate certificates, master's degrees or doctorates.[3] Over the preceding two decades, a new generation of scholars trained within or in relation to the Native Studies programs established since the 1960s has come of age, producing a steady stream of book-length studies and edited collections. While the focus here is regional, it bears repeating that the intellectual enterprise has long been *global*, linking scholars throughout the Americas to those in Africa and Asia, the Antipodes and the Pacific Islands.

The fruition of Native Studies represents, among other things, the institutional inscription of the Fourth World in academic discourse.[4] The Fourth World, as concept and movement, indicates a critique of the limitations of the anti-colonial politics of Third Worldism and a reassertion of an internally differentiated indigenous life-world that precedes and exceeds the tripartite division of the earth.[5] As a matter of practical-theoretical activity in the production of knowledge, Native

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Studies marks an intervention upon the study of colonialism in the most general sense, establishing and refining the primary distinction between its metropolitan and settler forms. Put differently, it is an analytic *differentiation* of colonialism and settler colonialism. One of the clearest formulations of this position is provided in the work of Lorenzo Veracini (2010) and in the scholarship gathered together under his founding editorship at the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*.[6]

Veracini (2011) uses the introduction to the inaugural issue to outline what he terms 'a proper appraisal of settler colonialism in its specificity', based upon the following premise: 'Colonizers and settler colonizers want essentially different things' (p. 1). These essentially different wants produce structurally divergent fundamental directives. Whereas the colonizer demands of the native 'you, work for me', the settler colonizer demands of the native 'you, go away'. Surely, colonialism and settler colonialism can and often do coexist within the same social formation, and even the same agent or agency with a particular order can issue colonial and settler colonial demands at once or in turn. But this empirical coincidence does not dissolve the need for analytic differentiation. More to the point, if the divergent spatiotemporal and relational logics of colonialism and settler colonialism cannot be fully comprehended, then the respective political-intellectual projects of decolonization and settler decolonization cannot be broached.

Veracini establishes that settler colonialism has been theoretically subsumed beneath the conceptual rubric of colonialism. As a result, the historical and geographical parameters of colonization become truncated and the political dimensions of the former situation – and longstanding, ongoing resistance to it – become illegible. For instance, the racial logic of colonialism tends to insist on permanent and unbridgeable differences between 'the colonizer and the colonized', to borrow the title of Albert Memmi's famous 1957 text. Accordingly, the preoccupation of the colonial order falls upon the segregation and exclusion of the native population from the mainstream institutions of the colony, except for token positions of quasi-authority, in order to continue the colonizer's domination – a relation that Jean-Paul Sartre described, in his introduction to Memmi's treatise, as a 'relentless reciprocity' (Memmi, 2003: 24). This fundamental division between the colonizer and the colonized is pursued in the historic instance through the production and reproduction of racial difference (Fanon, 2004).[7]

The colonial paradigm preserves the colonizer and the colonized as categories of racial difference and maintains the populations in that state, even when relations of production for the political and libidinal economies of colonialism request or require the deployment of genocidal violence. The spatiotemporal logic of colonialism is permanent division in service of hierarchy and the relational logic of what Fanon identifies as colonialism's characteristically stalled or frozen dialectic is one of interminable encounter ('something that wants itself ongoing'). Decolonization in this context entails breaking the colonial relation, ending the encounter, and removing the colonizer from the territory in order to destroy the zoning that creates spaces for different 'species' and enables such massive exploitation. In this, decolonization destroys the positions of both the colonizer and the colonized.

Settler colonialism, by contrast, seeks over time to eliminate the categories of colonizer and colonized through a process by which the former replaces the latter completely, usurping the claim to indigenous residence. 'You, go away' can mean the removal of the native population, its destruction through direct killing or the imposition of unlivable conditions, its assimilation into the settler colonial society, or some combination of each. As under the colonial paradigm, settler colonialism may deploy techniques for the production of racial difference, but it need not assume the strong form of permanent division. Likewise, settler colonialism may exploit the labor of the colonized en route, but the disappearance of the native is its *raison d'être*. The spatiotemporal logic of settler colonialism is transience in service of demographic substitution and its relational logic is one of radical non-encounter ('something that wants itself terminated'). Decolonization in this context

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entails articulating the colonial relation, revealing the encounter, and transforming the elementary terms of cohabitation. In this, *settler* decolonization destroys the positions of both the colonizer and the colonized.

However, we should underline a crucial difference between decolonization and settler decolonization. While it is true that decolonization seeks to undermine the conditions of possibility of colonialism, in expelling the colonizer – rather than eliminating him *as* colonizer – it holds open the possibility of return in the form of neo-colonialism. Settler decolonization, in turn, seeks to undermine the conditions of possibility of settler colonialism, but its trajectory involves consequences that are more severe, as it were, because the colonizer, having taken root on conquered land, must stay and live under a new dispensation. Undergoing conversion to native lifeways and submitting to native sovereignty and its related modes of governance, the erstwhile colonizer ceases to exist *as* colonizer, having been either taken in by the native community and/or repositioned, materially and symbolically, as a migrant engaged in an open-ended practice of reconciliation. Indeed, 'the struggle against settler colonialism must aim to keep the settler-indigenous relationship ongoing' in order to transform both of the operative terms and not only the relation itself (Veracini, 2011: 7).

This may seem like settler decolonization provides a non-violent alternative to the violence of decolonization, but to frame things in this way would be to miss the point entirely. The settler colonial paradigm that informs Native Studies does not only demand specificity in our understanding of colonialism. This is not, in other words, a conceptual distinction among previously conflated varieties or forms of colonialism, but rather the analytic differentiation of heterogeneous political phenomena. Settler colonialism is not a particularly extreme form of colonialism. More to the point, in the space forged by the theoretical object of settler colonialism, in its delineation with respect to colonialism, a *radicalization* of decolonization is enabled and, in my view, that radicalization *is* settler decolonization. As a result of discrepant material conditions, settler decolonization must needs not only, like decolonization, reclaim land and resources, assert the sovereignty of the indigenous people, protect or renew decolonial forms of collective life, and establish or reestablish decolonial forms of governance; but also, unlike decolonization, *pursue* the settler and undercut the very basis of his capacity and even his desire to rule. The project might be phrased as a re-articulation of Captain Richard Pratt's old Indian-hating maxim: kill the settler in him, and save the man. The analysis of settler colonialism developed within Native Studies is less a friendly amendment or point of clarification for the analysis of colonialism in general – simply broadening its scope – and more a critique and a challenge to contemplate a more profound liberation altogether.

Decolonizing Anti-Racism

Settler decolonization pursues liberation in and as indigenous resurgence, and obstacles to that resurgence, whether structural or ideological, must be confronted. Here, the critique of colonialism rehearsed above redounds upon the indigenous critique of anti-racism.[8] From within the conceptual apparatus attendant to the 2011 'Our Legacy' conference, thinking about 'Indigenous-African relations' in the North American context means, above all, challenging 'the manner in which anti-racism in Canada [and the USA] excludes Indigenous peoples'. This exclusion is far more than oversight; it indicates misrecognition of the nature of the state against which anti-racist politics is organized and to which the demands of anti-racist politics are addressed. Because Canada and the USA are settler colonial states, any progressive reform of relations with non-native black populations at best fails to disrupt that prior settler colonial situation and at worst serves to entrench its power and further conceal its basic facts. Anti-racism that is not grounded in the movement for

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settler decolonization is constrained to a politics whose 'horizon of … aspiration largely is full inclusion in the nation as citizens' (Rikfin, 2009: 102). That is, anti-racism without indigenous leadership is a wager for black junior partnership in the settler colonial state.

Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) are clear on several interrelated points to this end: First, any 'dialogue between antiracism theorists/activists and Indigenous scholars/communities requires talking on Indigenous terms' (p. 137). Second, anti-racism must find a way 'to place anti-racist agendas within the context of sovereignty and restoration of land', a practice that requires learning 'how to write, research, and teach in ways that account for Indigenous realities as foundational' (p. 137). Third, the 'pluralistic method of presenting diverse views' must yield to a 'synthesis' that takes on 'Indigenous epistemological frameworks and values' (p. 137). For these authors, this is the way by which African Americans (in the hemispheric sense of the Americas) can transform themselves from settlers to allies 'in the interests of a deeper solidarity' (Amadahy and Lawrence, 2009: 105).

Let me add that I find no problem with the synthetic gesture that rejects the 'pluralistic method of presenting diverse views'. The impetus behind the demand for black people to adopt indigenous ontology, epistemology and ethics, to speak on indigenous terms, and to situate their politics within the context of sovereignty is consistent with the movement for settler decolonization described above. In other words, settler decolonization sees in anti-racism the same pitfalls it sees in decolonization: both leave the colonizer intact and may even rely upon his continued existence for matters of recognition and redistribution. This point goes some way in explaining why there is a strong current *within* Native Studies cautioning its audience to avoid emulating black political struggle insofar as it is restricted to anti-racist aims.[9] The advice offered to native people and the critique and challenge posed to non-native black people (or to black people pursuing decolonization elsewhere) are recto and verso of a single axiom: 'emancipatory potential' is to be found in 'the possibility of the return of a land-based existence' (Waziyatawin, 2012: 82). Democratizing the settler colony as belatedly enfranchised citizens and subjects, or simply creating distance between colonizer and colonized without cancelling both terms, is to forfeit the possibility of genuine freedom for all while contributing to the destruction of 'the lands, waters, and ecosystems upon which [native] people [and ultimately all life] must survive' (p. 68). Hence:

> To acknowledge that we all share the same land base and yet to question the differential terms on which it is occupied is to become aware of the colonial project that is taking place around us. (Lawrence and Dua, 2005: 126)

In the broadest sense, the problem is posed as the difference between an indigenous and exogenous relation to the land, a problem of the terms of occupation. This frames the question of land as a question of sovereignty, wherein native sovereignty is a precondition for or element of the maintenance or renaissance of native *ways* of relating to the land. Surely, denial of sovereignty imperils native ways of relating, but sovereignty does not thereby guarantee this way will be followed. This is why much discussion *within* Native Studies is dedicated to thinking critically about what Waziyatawin (2012) terms 'the continued cooptation of our people into civilization's fallacies and destructive habits' (p. 68). How to resist such lures and the resultant disconnection from the land?

If the keywords of Native Studies are *resistance* (to settler colonial society and the global industrial civilization that comprises it) and *resurgence* (of native ways of life in and for our time) and if the source of both is a form of *self*-recognition among indigenous peoples – 'with the understanding that our cultures have much to teach the Western world about the establishment of relationships within and between peoples and the natural world that are profoundly non-imperialist'

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(Coulthard, 2007: 456) – then it stands to reason that black-native solidarity would pivot upon black people's willingness 'to provide material and moral support to … the Indigenous movement on Turtle Island' (Amadahy and Lawrence, 2009: 128). Solidarity here does not mean reciprocity. Because it is claimed that the 'majority of diasporic Black struggles … want equity *within* the laws, economy, and institutions of the colonial settler state' (p. 128, emphasis added), there is little to be gained from the indigenous encounter with blacks.

Are native calls for black solidarity simply expedient in a situation of settler colonialism? My sense is that there is something more complicated, and concerning, at work. If one surveys the writing on black-native solidarity in the field of Native Studies, one finds frequent reference to histories of shared struggle, strategic alliance, and cohabitation in place of or alongside acknowledgment of histories of Indian slavery, ongoing exclusion of black-native people, and pervasive anti-black racism. In drawing up the historical balance sheet this way, scholars suggest there is ground for black-native solidarity in the present. Even where there is no denial or minimization of the history of Indian slavery, even where native anti-black racism is recognized and the struggles of black-native people are affirmed, an argument is forwarded that solidarity in this moment can be retrieved from the past and refashioned for the future. In this sense, native peoples are seeking to reunite with lost allies, namely, those enslaved Africans from the early colonial period who demonstrated a 'a spiritual worldview, land-informed practices, and were held together by kinship structures which created relationships that allocated everyone a role in the community' (p. 127). This is political solidarity derived from 'cultural similarities'.

The implications of this claim are considerable. If black-native solidarity is founded upon shared indigenous worldviews, practices and kinship structures, then the prerequisite for black people to move, politically and ethically, from settlers to allies 'in the interest of a deeper solidarity' with native people is, in a word, *re-indigenization*. In so doing, black people on the North American scene not only become politically relevant to settler decolonization but also, en route, redress 'the true horror of slavery' – the loss of culture:

> Diasporic Black struggles, with some exceptions, do not tend to lament the loss of Indigeneity and the trauma of being ripped away from the land that defines their very identities. From Indigenous perspectives, the true horror of slavery was that it has created generations of 'de-culturalized' Africans, denied knowledge of language, clan, family, and land base, denied even knowledge of who their nations are. (Amadahy and Lawrence, 2009: 127)

From indigenous perspectives, diasporic black struggles would, first and foremost, need to lament the loss of indigeneity that slavery entails, a process that requires acknowledging that the loss is both historic and ongoing. This would be a more proper post-traumatic response than 'internalizing colonial concepts of how peoples relate to land, resources, and wealth' (p. 127). However, what becomes curious upon even the briefest reflection is the fact that 'denied knowledge of language, clan, family, and land base' – and the consequent temptation toward 'internalizing colonial concepts' – is precisely what native resistance and resurgence is struggling against to this day. To wit: 'I believe that the systematic disconnection (and dispossession) of Indigenous Peoples from our homelands is the defining characteristic of colonization' (Waziyatawin, 2012: 72). So, de-culturalization, or loss of indigeneity, is a general condition of black and native peoples, not one that native people can restrict to black people in order to offer (or withhold) sympathies.

The structuring difference between settler colonization and enslavement is to be found precisely in the latter's denial of 'knowledge of who their nations are' – that is, *deracination*. On this count, the loss of indigeneity for native peoples can be named and its recovery pursued, and that pursuit can (and must) become central to political mobilization. The loss of indigeneity for black peoples

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can be acknowledged only abstractly and its recovery is lost to history, and so something else must (and can) become central to political mobilization. Not the dialectics of loss and recovery but rather the loss of the dialectics of loss and recovery as such, a politics with no (final) recourse to foundations of any sort, a politics forged from critical resources immanent to the situation, resources from anywhere and anyone, which is to say from nowhere and no one *in particular*.

From indigenous perspectives, this baseless politics can only ever be a liability. Without a base, which is to say a land base, a politics of resistance can only succumb to 'civilization's fallacies and destructive habits'. The quest for equality is perhaps the most pernicious of those fallacies. The conclusion of this line of thinking is that, due to 'the trauma of being ripped away from the land that defines their very identities', landless black people in diaspora cannot mount genuine resistance to the settler colonial state and society; they can only be held apart from it *as slaves*. Which is to say that, without the benefits of a land-base and absent the constitutive exclusion of slavery, blacks are destined to become white, and thus *settlers*, in thought and action and, moreover, have effectively become so post-emancipation.[10] But rather than argue that black people in North America do, in fact, have significant, if attenuated, indigenous worldviews, practices and kinship structures or, in any case, can learn such from others in order to begin fighting the *good* fight; I submit we must consider the possibility that 1) the 'Black Diasporic struggles' under examination are irreducible to anti-racism, 2) that anti-racism is irreducible to demands upon the state, and 3) that demands upon the state are irreducible to statist politics.[11] Blacks need not be indigenous and/or enslaved Africans in order to be allies to native peoples in the Americas, whatever that might mean. And I say all of this without need of mentioning the 'notable exceptions' otherwise known as the black radical tradition.[12] What if there are, and will have always been, ways to pursue settler decolonization otherwise than as indigenous peoples and their immigrant allies, a movement from *within* that slavery whose abolition is yet to come?

Of course, not all Native Studies scholars adhere to this cultural criterion of political solidarity. But even among those attempting to coordinate struggles among black and native peoples on a political basis, related problems arise. The contributions of Andrea Smith in the last decade are perhaps most generative on this note (Smith, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2013). In a series of recent articles, Smith proposes one way to reframe the relational field of 'people of color' in North American political culture by thinking through the multiple logics of white supremacy, in relation to the enforcement of normative gender and sexuality, as a sort of permutation. The author thus nominates the three pillars: Slavery/Capitalism, Genocide/Colonialism, and Orientalism/War (Smith, 2010). We might recast them here as Racial Slavery, Settler Colonialism, and Orientalism, with the understanding that all are coeval, at least, with the history of capitalism. Each pillar operates according to a respective logic: the proprietary logic of slavery (through which captive Africans are rendered property of slaveholders and regarded as such by the larger society), the genocidal logic of settler colonialism (through which indigenous peoples are dispossessed of land, water and resources and made to disappear *as* indigenous peoples), and the militarist logic of Orientalism (through which the people of Asia, the Middle East, and eventually Latin America are constructed as inferior, yet threatening 'civilizations' subjected to imperial warfare and its domestic ramifications).

The aim of this tripartite scheme is to illustrate for each pillar how those inhabiting its logic might become complicit in the victimization of those inhabiting the other; the object is the fostering of strategic alliances across multiple axes of power, rather than a politics based on notions of shared victimhood along a single axis. For present purposes, we are prompted to develop approaches to political struggle that address *both* the indigenous/settler binary *and* the slave/master binary, working for settler decolonization while dismantling the hierarchy established by racial slavery. And these movements would be set about in tandem with the movement to end

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American imperialism abroad. Smith's formulation seeks to ascertain the fundamental dynamics in the relative positioning of various social groupings. The adjudication of those dynamics may involve not only the old canard of compromise (politics reduced to the art of being uncomfortable), but also the creation of new abilities to think in different registers in turn or at once. To this end, 'we might focus on actually building the political power to create an alternative system to the heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, settler colonial state' (Smith, 2012: 87).

While the three pillars model seeks to typify and diagram interrelated logics, it makes no explicit attempt at analytical synthesis or integrated political strategy. Synthesis and strategy are implied, however, a point that becomes clear when we look more closely at the working definitions of racial slavery and settler colonialism. In 'Three Pillars', Smith describes the logic of slavery as one that 'renders Black people as inherently slaveable – as nothing more than property'. She goes on to situate slavery as the 'anchor of capitalism', but in a peculiar way:

> That is, the capitalist system ultimately commodifies all workers – one's own person becomes a commodity that one must sell in the labor market while the profits of one's work are taken by someone else. To keep this capitalist system in place – which ultimately commodifies most people – the logic of slavery applies a racial hierarchy to this system. This racial hierarchy tells people that as long as you are not Black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism. This helps people who are not Black to accept their lot in life, because they can feel that at least they are not at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy – at least they are not property; at least they are not slaveable. (Smith, 2006: 67)

We can agree that under the capitalist system one must sell their labor power and that it will be commodified as labor, which is to say it will be converted into a factor of production. We can agree that under the capitalist system the surplus value of social labor – not the bourgeois notion of individual work – is appropriated by the owners of the means of production and converted into profit. That is the basic structure of labor exploitation under capital.[13] We must object, however, that labor exploitation is a commodification of 'one's own *person*' or that the capitalist system 'ultimately commodifies most *people*'. If this were true, then slavery as the conversion of person into property would simply be an extreme form of labor exploitation.[14] Or, vice versa, exploitation would be an attenuated form of slavery. In either case, there would be only a difference of degree rather than kind between exploitation and slavery. At any rate, disabusing ourselves of anti-black racism would, for Smith, enable us to see that they inhabit the same logic and that black struggles against racial slavery are *ultimately* struggles against capitalism.

Something similar happens with respect to Smith's statement of the relation between racial slavery and settler colonialism. When she returns, in a more recent article on voting rights and native disappearance, to reprise her concept of racial slavery, she has this to say about the ideological formation of anti-black racism and its effects on critical intellectual production:

> Because Africa is the property of Europe, Africa must then appear as always, already colonized. […] The colonization of Africa must disappear so that Africa can appear as ontologically colonized. Only through this disavowed colonization can Black peoples be ontologically relegated to the status of property. Native peoples by contrast, are situated as potential citizens. Native peoples are described as 'free' people, albeit 'uncivilized'. (Smith, 2013: 355)

Smith rightly argues that the racist designation of native people as free, albeit uncivilized, precitizens is not a privilege (i.e. proximity to whiteness) in relation to the racist designation of black people as unfree anti-citizens incapable of civilization (i.e. antipode of whiteness) because the civilizing mission through which native peoples are forcibly assimilated into the settler colonial society is, in fact, a form and aspect of genocide. Yet, what is missed in the attempt to demonstrate that

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Black Studies is also, like Native Studies, concerned with colonization is the plain fact that colonization is not essential, much less prerequisite, to enslavement. In other words, to say that it is *only* through 'disavowed colonization' that black people can be 'ontologically relegated to the status of property' is a feint, just as it is to suggest that capitalism 'ultimately commodifies most *people*'. In this case, enslavement would be enabled by a prior colonization that it extends *perforce*. If this were true, then slavery as the conversion of person into property would simply be an extreme form of colonization. Or, vice versa, colonization would be an attenuated form of slavery. In either case, there would be only a difference of degree rather than kind between colonization and slavery. At any rate, disabusing ourselves of anti-black racism would, for Smith, enable us to see that black struggles against racial slavery are *ultimately* struggles against colonialism.

Colonization is not a necessary condition of enslavement because: 1) slaves need not be colonial subjects, or objects of colonial exploitation, and they do not face the fundamental directive of colonialism, 'you, work for me', though slaves often enough labor; and 2) slaves need not be settler colonial subjects, or objects of settler colonial genocide, since they do not face the fundamental directive 'you, go away', though slaves often enough are driven from their native land. But the crucial problem with this formulation of the relations between racial slavery, settler colonialism and capitalism (leaving aside any problems with the pillar of Orientalism) has to do with the *drive* to confound the position of blacks in order to describe them as exploited and colonized *degree zero*. Regarding the latter, Smith writes, 'Africa is the property of Europe'; *Africa* rather than the *African*. As in the reduction of slavery to the exploitation of labor, there is here an elision of the permanent seizure of the body essential to enslavement.[15]

What can be done to a captive body? Anything whatsoever. The loss of sovereignty is a fait accompli, a byproduct rather than a precondition of enslavement. Genocide is endemic to enslavement insofar as slavery bans, legally and politically, the reproduction of enslaved peoples *as* peoples, indigenous or otherwise, whether they are removed from their native land, subjected to direct killing, unlivable conditions, or forced assimilation; or they are kept in place, allowed to live, provided adequate means, or supported in their cultural practices.[16] Native Studies scholars misrecognize 'the true horror of slavery' as de-culturalization or the loss of sovereignty because they do not ask what slavery is in the most basic sense – its local and global histories, its legal and political structures, its social and economic functions, its psychosexual dynamics, and its philosophical consequences. Perhaps they do not want to know anything about it, as they evaluate it through the lens of their own loss and lament and redress it through the promise of their own political imagination. Slavery is not a loss that the self experiences – of language, lineage, land, or labor – but rather the loss of any self that could experience such loss. Any politics based in resurgence or recovery is bound to regard the slave as 'the position of the unthought' (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003).[17]

Abolishing Sovereignty

There is by now a literature on the historical relations between black and native peoples in the Americas, including, in the US context, the award-winning work of Tiya Miles (2006, 2010) and the signal contributions of Barbara Krauthamer (2013).[18] But Frank B. Wilderson, III's *Red, White and Black* may be the first sustained attempt to theorize, at the highest level of abstraction, the structural positions of European colonists, Indigenous peoples, and African slaves in the 'New World' encounter and to think about how the conflicts and antagonisms that give rise to those positions in the historic instance establish the contemporary parameters of our political ontology. At this writing, Wilderson's text has not been taken up in the field of Native Studies, despite dedicating fully 100 pages to addressing directly the machinations of settler colonialism and the history of genocide and to critically reading a range of indigenous thinking on politics, cosmology, and

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sovereignty. This is not a brief in favor of Wilderson's project as resolution or answer. The upshot of *Red, White and Black* is a provocation to new critical discourse and just such an invitation is offered midway, even as it acknowledges the grand impediment: 'What, we might ask, inhibits this analytic and political dream of a "Savage"/Slave encounter? Is it a matter of the Native theorist's need to preserve the constituent elements of sovereignty, or is there such a thing as "Savage" Negrophobia? Are the two related' (Wilderson, 2010: 182)?

We might understand something else about the historical relations between black and native peoples if we bear in mind that the dynamics of Negrophobia are animated, in part, by a preoccupation with sovereignty. We have learned already that settler colonialism is governed by a genocidal commandment and that, as a direct result, survival becomes central to indigenous movements for settler decolonization. We have also learned that sovereignty, even disarticulated from the state-form, is the heading for thinking about this survival as a matter of politics.[19] Yet, in its struggle against settler colonialism, the claim of native sovereignty – emerging in contradiction to the imposition of the imperial sovereignty of Euro-American polities[20] – 'fortifies and extends the interlocutory life of America [or Canada or …] as a coherent (albeit genocidal) idea, because treaties are forms of articulation, discussions brokered between two groups presumed to possess the same kind of historical currency: sovereignty' (Wilderson, 2003: 236).

This point is not mitigated by the fact that native sovereignty is qualitatively different from, not simply rival to, the sovereignty of nation-states. What links these statements discursively is an 'ethico-onto-epistemological' (Barad, 2007) point of contact: 'At every scale – the soul, the body, the group, the land, and the universe – they can both practice cartography, and although at every scale their maps are radically incompatible, their respective "mapness" is never in question' (Wilderson, 2010: 181).[21] Capacity for coherence makes more than likely a commitment 'to preserve the constituent elements of sovereignty' (2010: 182) and a pursuit of the concept of 'freedom as self-determination'.[22] The political de-escalation of antagonism to the level of conflict is mirrored by a conceptual domestication at work in the field of Native Studies, namely, that settler colonialism is something already known and understood by its practitioners. The political-intellectual challenge on this count is to refine this knowledge and to impart it. The intervention of Native Studies involves bringing into general awareness a critical knowledge of settler colonialism.

We might contrast the unsuspecting theoretical status of the concept of settler colonialism in Native Studies with its counterpart in Black Studies: racial slavery. I remarked above that any politics of resurgence or recovery is bound to regard the slave as the position of the unthought. This does not suggest, however, that Black Studies is the field in which slavery is, finally, thought in an adequate way. The field of Black Studies is as susceptible to a politics of resurgence or recovery as any other mode of critical inquiry. Which is to say that the figure of the slave and the history of the emergence of the relational field called racial slavery remains the unthought ground of thought *within* Black Studies as well. The difference, provisionally, between these enterprises is that whereas Native Studies sets out to be the alternative to a history of settler colonialism and to pronounce the decolonial intervention, Black Studies dwells within an un-inheritable, in-escapable history and muses upon how that history intervenes upon its own field, providing a sort of untranscendable horizon for its discourse and imagination. The latter is an endeavor that teaches less through pedagogical instruction than through exemplary transmission: rather than initiation into a form of *living*, emulation of a process of *learning* through the posing of a question, a procedure for study, for *black* study, or black *studies*, wherever they may lead.

Native Studies scholars are right to insist upon a synthetic gesture that attempts to shift the terms of engagement. The problem lies at the level of thought at which the gesture is presented. The settler colonial studies critique of colonial studies must be repeated, this time with respect to settler colonialism itself, in a move that returns us to the body in relation to land, labor, language,

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lineage – and the capture and commodification of each – in order to ask the most pertinent questions about capacity, commitment, and concept. This might help not only to break down false dichotomies, and perhaps pose a truer one, but also to reveal the ways that the study of slavery is already and of necessity the study of capitalism, colonialism and settler colonialism, among other things; and that the struggle for abolition is already and of necessity the struggle for the promise of communism, decolonization, and settler decolonization, among other things. Slavery is the threshold of the political world, abolition the interminable radicalization of every radical movement. Slavery, as it were, precedes and prepares the way for colonialism, its forebear or fundament or support. Colonialism, as it were, the issue or heir of slavery, its outgrowth or edifice or monument. This is as true of the historic colonization of the Third World as it is the prior and ongoing settler colonization of the Fourth.[23]

'The modern world owes its very existence to slavery' (Grandin, 2014a).[24] What could this impossible debt possibly entail? Not only the infrastructure of its global economy but also the architecture of its theological and philosophical discourses, its legal and political institutions, its scientific and technological practices, indeed, the whole of its semantic field (Wilderson, 2010: 58). A politics of abolition could never finally be a politics of resurgence, recovery, or recuperation. It could only ever begin with degeneration, decline, or dissolution. Abolition is the interminable radicalization of every radical movement, but a radicalization through the perverse affirmation of deracination, an uprooting of the natal, the nation, and the notion, preventing any order of determination from taking root, a politics without claim, without demand even, or a politics whose demand is 'too radical to be formulated in advance of its deeds' (Trouillot, 2012: 88).[25]

The field of Black Studies consists in 'tracking the figure of the *un*sovereign' (Chandler, 2013: 163) in order to meditate upon the paramount question: *'What if the problem is sovereignty as such'* (Moten, 2013)? Abolition, the political dream of Black Studies, its unconscious thinking, consists in the affirmation of the unsovereign slave – the affectable, the derelict, the monstrous, the wretched[26] – figures of an order altogether different from (even when they coincide or cohabit with) the colonized native – the occupied, the undocumented, the unprotected, the oppressed. Abolition is beyond (the restoration of) sovereignty. Beyond the restoration of a lost commons through radical redistribution (everything for everyone), there is the unimaginable loss of that all too imaginable loss itself (nothing for no one).[27] If the indigenous relation to land precedes and exceeds any regime of property, then the slave's inhabitation of the earth precedes and exceeds any prior relation to land – landlessness. And selflessness is the correlate. No ground for identity, no ground to stand (on). Everyone has a claim to everything until no one has a claim to anything. No claim. This is not a politics of despair brought about by a failure to lament a loss, because it is not rooted in hope of winning. The flesh of the earth demands it: the landless inhabitation of selfless existence.

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Notes

1. See the official website: http://www.yorku.ca/laps/des/conference/index.html. The conference, held 29 April–1 May 2011, featured presentations and performances by over 50 participants. For a critical response to Lawrence and Dua (2005) see Sharma and Wright (2008). The latter argument makes important conceptual distinctions between and among immigrants, settlers and colonists, but does not resolve the problem pursued below.
2. On the symptom, see Lacan (2006): 'they do not see that the unconscious *only has meaning in the*

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Other's field; still less do they see the consequences thereof: that it is not the effect of *meaning* that is operative in interpretation, but rather the articulation in the symptom of signifiers (*without any meaning at all*) that have gotten caught up in it' (714, emphasis added). On symptomatic reading and the problematic, see Althusser and Balibar (1997), especially Part I.

3. For overviews of the field see Mihesuah and Wilson (2004), Kidwell and Velie (2005), and Kuokkanen (2007).
4. See Manuel and Posluns (1974), McFarlane (1993) and, generally, the work of the Center for World Indigenous Studies, including its publication *The Fourth World Journal*. For discussion of indigenous women in relation to the Fourth World concept see Lewallen (2003).
5. For recent treatments of the 'Three Worlds' concept and Third Worldism see Berger (2009) and Prashad (2007).
6. *Settler Colonial Studies* (Taylor & Francis: London) was founded in 2011. On the history of US settler colonialism see Hixson (2013). I should add that this article does not address the emergent scholarship of Tiffany King (2014), who rightly argues that antiblackness, and more specifically the production of black fungibility, is constitutive to settler colonialism. I hope to say something about her important intervention in subsequent work. Suffice it to say that it is not only settler colonialism that requires the material and symbolic production of fungible black bodies, but also, as I suggest herein, the political discourse and imagination of settler decolonization and native sovereignty.
7. See Wilderson (2010) for an attempt to rethink the racial logic of colonialism, described by Fanon as the disavowed racial logic of slavery, which is to say anti-blackness.
8. It redounds upon the indigenous critique of feminism as well (Arvie et al., 2013).
9. See, for instance, Coulthard (2007). For Coulthard, Fanon is right that the politics of recognition is a dead-end, yet he is nonetheless 'ultimately mistaken regarding violence being the "perfect mediation" through which the colonized come to liberate themselves from both the structural and psycho-affective features of colonial domination' (p. 455). Black thought can, in this way, inform and inspire, but not *orient* indigenous politics.
10. As a rule, Native Studies reproduces the dominant liberal political narrative of emancipation and enfranchisement. See, for example, Cook-Lynn (1997). For a critique of emancipation that distinguishes it from the abolition of slavery see Binder (1995). See also, generally, Hartman (1997).
11. Smith (2013) acknowledges 'it may be possible to strategically engage the US political system without granting it legitimacy' (p. 366), but on this count it only seems to be true in the case of native peoples. Whenever black civil rights are addressed, they are reduced to bids for inclusion in state and civil society and capable of producing, at best, a form of liberal multiculturalism based upon a bankrupt politics of recognition.
12. The seminal study of the black radical tradition is, of course, Robinson (2000). For recent additional sources see Davies (2007), Kelley (2002), and Ransby (2005).
13. I am gesturing, of course, to ideas outlined in Karl Marx's 1847 lectures to the German Workingmen's Club of Brussels, later serialized as *Wage Labor and Capital*, and subsequently developed in his 1859 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and his 1867 magnum opus *Capital, Volume 1*.
14. 'African Americans have been traditionally valued for their labor, hence, it is in the interest of the dominant society to have as many people marked "Black" as possible, thereby maintaining a cheap labor pool' (Smith, 2006: 71).
15. The elision of the body can be found again in Rifkin (2009), who seeks to shift the reception of the political philosophy of Giorgio Agamben from a focus on the biopolitics of race to the geopolitics of place, with a correlative reworking on Agamben's notion of 'bare life' as 'bare habitance'. Without adjudging Rifkin's reading of Agamben, we note that to displace race with place by juxtaposing body with land and rights with sovereignty – thereby juxtaposing blacks-as-*embodying* with natives-as-*inhabiting* (without thinking diacritically about black inhabitation and native embodiment) – serves to dis-embody and de-racialize native peoples, which is to say gain or maintain *distance* toward racial blackness, in order to pursue the critical discussion of metapolitical authority.
16. 'To some degree the standard-of-living issue is universal: it applies to feudalism as well as to capitalism, to slave as well as free societies. But a slave was a slave, whether he lived a healthy hundred years

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or a sickly forty, whether she was better fed than a Polish peasant or more miserably housed than an American yeoman. […] We can only measure the substance of such criticism if we understand why *'slavery' and 'freedom' do not refer to material wellbeing*. […] Freedom and slavery are at bottom political categories; they refer to the distributions of power in society' (Oakes, 1990: xv–xvi).

17. One should hear in this phrase the resonance between a political theory of the universal particular and a psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious. I hope to take this up in subsequent work.
18. These titles demonstrate not only the continuity between white and native forms of racial slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries, but also the *centrality* of native slavery to the history of racial slavery as such. Centrality is indicated here not as a measure of empirical preponderance, but rather of legal and political significance.
19. On the critical differences between conceptions of native sovereignty and the sovereignty of the nation-state, see Simpson (2013).
20. '[An] origin is constituted as such only as an effect of displacement' (Chandler, 2013: 138).
21. For a powerful meditation on cartographic incoherence and incapacity see Brand (2001).
22. For a fundamental critique of sovereignty and freedom as self-determination see da Silva (2007).
23. See, for instance, Blackburn (1997), Green (2011), Manning (1990), Solow (1991), Wynter (1995).
24. For a more fulsome argument see Grandin (2014b).
25. This reference to the Haitian Revolution does not only take it as a world-historical emblem of abolition, but also views it within the ongoing abolitionism that ties it to 'a much larger and perhaps even more successful slave rebellion in the United States' (Hahn, 2009).
26. See, respectively, da Silva (2007) on the affectable, Wilderson (2010) on the derelict, Spillers (2003) on the monstrous, and Marriott (2011) on the wretched.
27. 'What would the *politics* of a dead relation, a slave, look like' (Wilderson, 2008: 106, emphasis added)? For recent writing on the global commons see Linebaugh (2014), Milum (2010), and Shantz (2013).

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